
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	460-462 Ridge Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Permit Review
Meeting Date:	July 26, 2012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#12-210	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, Blue Sky Housing LLC (owner), seeks concept review for a new 2 and 3 story brick residential building on the vacant lot at 460 Ridge St NW and combining it with 462 Ridge Street NW for a total of six units. Plans were prepared by MWB Architects, PC. This case was first reviewed in April 2012.

Property Description and Context

Ridge Street is a narrow one-block street originally platted as an alley. The street is characterized by modest, two-story flat-fronted frame and brick houses, rare survivors of what were once typical and fairly common 19th century working class alley dwellings. The street contains at least 7 houses constructed before the Civil War, and despite a period of construction that spans from as early as 1855 to as late as 1911, they have a remarkable consistency of simple block forms, punched windows, and spare detailing.

The existing structure at 462 Ridge is two stories and three bays wide with a wood modillion and bracket cornice. It is 15 feet wide and 36 feet deep. The right bay is occupied by a garage door on the front façade, a relatively modern alteration that hints that that portion of 462 Ridge is not original to the house. Most likely, 462 Ridge was expanded to the west sometime in the early 20th century and the cornice extended across the new three bay width. The open space to the east of 462 Ridge is two building lots, but only the immediate adjacent lot is part of this concept review.

Proposal

In April, the Board determined that the visibility resulting from a third floor set back 36 feet from the front façade and built across both the historic building and new building was incompatible with the character of the historic district. This was substantially because of the unconventional building profile that would result and be clearly visible along the street to both the west and east. Otherwise, the Board expressed a positive opinion for the planned restoration of 462 Ridge and new façade design for 460 Ridge.

The applicant has revised the design to eliminate any new construction on top of the historic building at 462 Ridge. The new construction at 460 Ridge still calls for a setback third floor, but the profile has been changed to one that slopes up from a point 10 feet set back from the front to a roof ridge 32 feet back from the front. The rear slope of the roof flattens out to accommodate a floor to ceiling height tall enough for a small third floor unit. In front of the sloped section would be space for a roof deck screened by parapet walls. The new side profile has also been moderated by extending the new façade at 460 Ridge so that it would be slightly taller than 462 Ridge. The expanded façade area is

filled by slightly taller windows at the second floor, panels of patterned brick, and a cornice with frieze board.

Evaluation

The Board has cited the importance of the distinct two-story nature of Ridge Street in its review of multiple projects on this block.¹ Consistently, the Board has required that any set-back third floor additions or three-story wings on new construction not be visible from within Ridge Street.

The current proposal for 460-462 Ridge Street does not eliminate the set-back third floor completely, but instead tries to blend it into the streetscape to a suitable level by borrowing a rare historic house form found on Ridge Street. This attempt does not necessarily aim to eliminate visibility, but to make what would be visible compatible with this particular streetscape. The historic form is a low-sloped gable roof, which because of the small dimensions of the mid-19th century houses and tight confines of narrow Ridge Street, results in a traditional roof form of limited visibility from the front. On the exposed visible sides, the side-gable is a classic vernacular shape: a short, broad-based triangle. Three examples of this type are at 477-481 Ridge, across the street from the subject property.

However, the way this roof shape is put to use at 460 Ridge misses the mark in a few ways which mostly stem from the dimensions of the site and desired number of units. When the side-gable roof form is subtle and natural, dimensions are small, e.g. the house at 481 Ridge is 30 feet deep with a ridge 15 feet back from the front. At 460 Ridge however the design calls for essentially a doubling of these dimensions: 67 feet deep and a ridge 32 feet back from the front. Even at a roof pitch similar to the historic examples, the roof rises much taller than nearby examples because the roof starts at a taller height. Additionally, to include a unit on the third floor, the roof form on the rear extends flat instead of sloping back down. While this is necessary for interior head-heights, the resulting exterior side profile is prominently visible along Ridge Street. Working with staff, many side elevation roof combinations using the side-gable device have been tried out, but none reach the goal of a subtle and compatible profile.

There are few remaining scenarios that might accommodate a third floor unit and also be compatible with the historic district. A three-story building with a roof sloped gradually to the rear (nearly flat) would certainly provide enough space for a third floor unit at the front, but whether that height on a single lot as narrow as this could be compatible with the small scale and consistent proportions of Ridge Street is unclear.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board:

- *find the concept for a two-story building with a visible setback third floor to be incompatible with the character of the historic district and therefore not consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.*

¹ The Board cited the importance of retaining the two-story character of the block in its review of 1211 4th St NW (HPA #09-151), 438 Ridge St NW (HPA #09-147), 451-453 Ridge St NW (HPA #09-244), 447 Ridge St NW (HPA #09-357), and 481 Ridge St NW (HPA #10-071). These cases all dealt with adding height to the rear of existing houses or were for new construction.